

PART II.—REVIEWS

Female Life in Prison. By a PRISON MATRON. 3rd edit. 2 vols.
Hurst and Blackett, 1862.

A BOOK which gives some account of the inner life of our prisons, and records with faithful simplicity a prison matron's experience of the nature of female criminals, is a welcome addition to literature, and stands in need of no recommendation. No doubt it will painfully surprise many amiable people to learn to what a depth of degradation woman sometimes sinks; it will be difficult for them to conceive how she can so completely lose all sense of shame, modesty, self-respect, and gentleness, all her womanliness, and become violent, cruel, outrageously blasphemous, and impudently immodest; in fact, a sort of fiend with all the vices of woman in an exaggerated form, and with none of her virtues. And yet such is the picture which the authoress paints with evident truthfulness, and with a tender feeling towards these outcasts. As, however, human nature in any form must ever be of deep and abiding interest to mankind, we cannot but be thankful for a work which, like the present, lifts the veil from a hitherto unknown phase of it.

There must be very few who have not experienced at one time or another a lively curiosity to know what sort of beings criminals are: persistent sinners against society, how do they come to such a wicked pass? It really is very remarkable, when we consider it, that any being endowed with rational faculties, should deliberately set his hand against every man, when he has to take such a vast deal of trouble to do it with anything like success, and when he runs such immense risks, however well he does it. For the devil's wages are not high, and the skill which he demands is very high. Moreover, his Satanic majesty does not rule the world, so that however faithful a servant you may be, you still run the greatest danger of being taken prisoner by the other side. Strange in very truth that any man should subject himself to the liability of having the firm grasp of a strong rough hand suddenly fixed in his collar, a protuberant knuckle painfully pushed into his jugular region, his hands ignominiously handcuffed, and his person carried off triumphantly to the lock-up in the sight of Heaven and of men. Human nature cannot be dignified, but does look, and must feel, foolish under those circumstances; and then to be placed in the prison dock, with respectability in the jury-box gravely censuring, and wisdom under a wig sentencing, and an

interested public looking on as on some strange animal—all that is surely not a thing to be desired by humanity possessing any little remnant of native dignity. To say nothing of having all your habits roughly changed, your comforts taken away, and yourself being forced to act according to painfully fixed regulations—to be compelled to have your hair cropped at the expense of the county, to get up at a certain hour, and to go to bed at a certain hour, to walk in silence for a certain time, and to turn a crank for a certain time, and of necessity to do other such things very repugnant to a human will conscious of its freedom.

There might, it is conceivable, be an advantage in committing crime, if there was a certainty of not being found out; but when a calculation of chances reduces the probability almost to a certainty of being found out, it is marvellous that any density of stolidity should venture on the unprofitable game. Perhaps it is that the criminal often thinks that others will undoubtedly be found out, but that he will not; that there will be some exception to the usual course of things in his favour. Many good people seem to be honestly of opinion that the laws of nature will be accommodated to their particular cases; and so it is not to be wondered at if the foolish criminal, who has such a strong interest in deceiving himself, should entertain such an opinion. But how, again, can that self-deception console the murderer? When Banquo's ghost appeared, the brave Macbeth quailed like a very coward; and can the murderer's thoughts ever escape the ghost of his victim's presence? If he reflects in his gloomy cell, how is it possible that he can eat and drink, and sleep, and live, and not die of despair at his immense folly, or of horror at his fearful guilt? As a matter of fact, however, it appears that a murderer is often less afflicted than the petty thief who has stolen a snuff-box. "There are women in our many prisons," says the prison matron, "mourning over petty thefts, but there are murderesses to all outward appearance defiant, or cheerful, or *light-hearted*." And again: "Women who are in for murder, more especially for the murder of their children, are, as a rule, the best behaved, the most light-hearted prisoners." Speaking of a certain Elizabeth Harris, guilty of the cold-blooded murder of her two children, she says, "She was another of those who, in captivity for crimes of the deepest dye, became the most quiet and best behaved of prisoners. As a rule, murderesses are the women most apt to conform to prison discipline, most anxious to gain the good-will of their officers, and easily swayed by a kind word. They are not generally of the lowest grade—that is, not the most illiterate and mentally depraved."

Human nature is so wondrously clever in deceiving itself, without knowledge of its hypocrisy, that it would scarce be a matter for surprise if we were told that a cold-blooded murderer sometimes really believed himself a meritorious person, and considered himself ill-

treated when he was hanged. Not perhaps that, as a matter of abstract right, he would hold it to be a proper thing to commit murder, but, in the particular circumstances of his case, the act was completely different from any similar act, was, if considered in all its relations, almost inevitable. Probably he might honestly confess as far as this—that he certainly ought not to have done that particular thing, which has been a circumstance whereby the murder has been brought home to him; but reason till doomsday, if that were possible, and you would not obtain a thoroughly sincere confession that he ought not to have done the deed. He confesses and regrets his mistake in the execution with all sincerity, and not his guilt in the act. His inward sorrow is, not that he has done it, but that he has done it badly. Remorse is the dread of discovery; and when he has been convicted, he deems the sentence a full equivalent for the crime. And he is by no means singular in his self-deception. It is always an impossibility to explain how it is that many punctiliously religious people, who sincerely believe themselves to be pious, do contrive to reconcile their belief with the mean and deceitful course of their daily lives. Men will eagerly grasp at the small fruits of a miserable deception, who will willingly spend much more than they gain thereby, in accordance with their religious convictions of what is due from them in charitable aid to the unfortunate. And, after all, there is not any fundamental difference, in regard to the morality of the actions, between the deceit effected by a lie, and the theft accomplished by a sleight of hand. The thief is, perhaps, if there be anything to choose between them, a little less contemptible a being, for he braves a recognised punishment, and knows that he is doing it; whereas the moral scoundrel, who is not a legal criminal, sneaks through a crime, foolishly fancying that there is no punishment for it. Strange inconsistency! The latter, who may be causing far more mischief and misery than the former, does not consider himself criminal at all; and his unconscious hypocrisy may justly entitle us to put this question:—Does the prison criminal, as a rule, deem himself guilty or only unfortunate?

As a genuine fool is not conscious of his folly, so, perhaps, the genuine criminal is not thoroughly conscious of his crime. It was the natural, if not the inevitable, thing for him, with his constitution and in his circumstances. Morally insane, or a sort of moral idiot, he cannot recognise a world beyond the world immediately around him, of which he, self-feeling mortal, is the centre. He regards everything in its relation to himself, nothing in its relation to things and beings beyond himself. He is worse than the animal; for while the animal acts in that way instinctively, and therefore in accordance with the laws of its nature, he, as a reason-endowed being, does so anti-rationally, and therefore in opposition to the laws of nature. And the degeneration of a higher type descends in degradation below

the natural state of a lower type. Monkeys cannot justly be called moral idiots, because there is not in a monkey's nature the potentiality of moral development; but where there is such a potentiality in human nature, and, by reason of unfavorable circumstances, it has not been solicited into manifestation as an actuality, the term moral idiocy may be correctly used. Crime is such a palpable folly that it is difficult to conceive any one in full possession of his rational faculties systematically committing it. Brutal ignorance of good and a wicked training in evil do, however, inevitably bring about a condition of human nature in which to look for the good works which spring from moral aspirations would be as hopeless as to look for grapes on thorns, or figs on thistles. A man cannot live save in some sort of harmony with the circumstances around him; and if a moral germ is placed in an atmosphere of crime, the result must be, as regards it, what the result would be to the respiratory function if an animal with gills were placed in the air, or an animal with lungs were placed in the water. "Train up a child in the way it should go, and when it is old it will not depart from it;" and train up a child in the way it should *not* go, and when it is old it will not depart from it—upon which text this book on 'Prison Life' affords a mournful comment. We rise from its perusal with the conviction that there would be more hope of the Ethiopian changing his skin than of the confirmed criminal changing his nature.

It admits of very serious question whether there is not much ill-judged and misspent sentimentality displayed with regard to criminals. Things plainly do not proceed by chance, but by law, in the world; and it is surely unprofitable, if nothing more, to grieve over a result which has inevitably come to pass in accordance with natural laws, and should, therefore, be accepted with equanimity by those who do not wish the cessation of law and the wreck of the universe. Criminals are extremely unloveable beings; and the best way of patiently bearing with them, and of reconciling oneself to doing the best for them, is to accept them like a storm at sea or a pestilence on land. "As a class," says the matron, "they are desperately wicked. As a class deceitful, crafty, malicious, lewd, and void of common feeling. . . . There are all the vices under the sun exemplified in these hundreds of women, and but a sparse sprinkling of those virtues which should naturally adorn and dignify womanhood." One of our novelists, indeed, who is somewhat remarkable for his forced and false sentimentalism, says that however low they may have fallen, they still grasp some of the tufts and shreds of that unfenced precipice from which they fell from good, and that not to pity them is to do wrong to time and eternity. Would it not be doing the best possible service to time and eternity to get rid of them altogether? Furthermore, has not humanity been labouring from the days of Adam unto the present day to fence that precipice over which they

fall? And does it not, so to speak, hold on with all its might to the garments of those perverse mortals who will climb the fence, until the garment gives way and the fragment is left in its hand? The question is really not a sentimental one of unfenced precipices, but a calm question as to the means of preventing the production of criminals. It is not to be decided by the emotion which so often misleads, but by that calm exercise of the intellect which would be employed with regard to the injurious effects of physical laws. We have, in point of fact, to deal, if not strictly with a degenerate species, certainly with a degenerate variety of the human race; and the problem is to reduce it as much as possible. The effects which are in existence cannot, it is evident, be done away with by removing the causes, for they have become causes and will go on working through successive effects; but by removing the causes in present operation, the production of future effects of a like kind will be prevented.

A criminal, like any other fact in nature, is not independent of his antecedents and the conditions of his development. If he is born of vicious parents, as many a one is, and if his education has been the education of scoundrelism in the midst of the dangerous classes, it would surely be strange if he were not a scoundrel. The human organism grows into a harmony with its circumstances; it assimilates the force of them, and incorporates it into its nature; so that the individual born in crime, and nurtured in the midst of it, naturally commits crime. Immorality becomes his morality, that to which his nature instinctively aspires, and to which he has been consciously formed. The Emperor Napoleon, according to M. Villermé, used often to maintain in his conversations at the island of Elba, that "in whatever relation a man be looked at, *he is as much the product of his physical and moral atmosphere as of his organization.*" The Emperor Napoleon was a causationist, as every greatly successful man must be, and as every benevolent man should be who is wishful to benefit society by diminishing the crime which scourges it. There is no difficulty in learning where to begin. "Ignorance, deep-besotted ignorance, displays itself with almost every fresh woman on whom the key turns in her cell. It is the great reason for keeping our prisons full, our judges always busy; three fourths of our prisoners, before their conviction, were unable to read a word, had no knowledge of a Bible or what was in it, had never heard of a Saviour, and only remembered God's name as always coupled with a curse. Some women have been trained to be thieves, and worse than thieves, by their mothers—taking their lessons in crime with a regularity and a persistence that, turned to better things, would have made them loved and honoured all their lives. They have been taught all that is evil, and the evil tree has flourished and borne fruit; it is the hardest task to train so warped and disturbed a creation to the right and fitting way." A hard task, indeed! often

only a little less hopeless, it is to be feared, than that of washing the blackamoor white.

It is well known that the number of different crimes which occur in each year is tolerably constant. We can, in fact, predict with considerable exactness how many murders there will be in a year, how many cases of poisoning, how many crimes against property. "Experience proves," says Quetelet, "that not only is the same number of murders annually committed, but even that the instruments which are employed to commit them are made use of in the same proportion." Whilst the conditions of society remain the same, it is clear that the same result must always be expected; there are the same causes in operation, and the same effects will follow. "Society," says Quetelet again, "contains the germs of all the crimes which may be committed, and at the same time the facilities necessary to their development. It is in some sort which it prepares the crimes, and the culprit is only the instrument which executes them."* There is undoubtedly truth in this, if society be regarded as a whole, if the number of individuals observed be so great that the disturbing action of the individual is not apparent; but it behoves us to be careful not to regard the statistical average proving the constancy of crime as a law of nature absolutely governing individual action. The generalisation is arrived at by induction from the facts of society; but society is constituted by individuals, and there is no absolute necessity that society should remain what it is; on the contrary, there is a cogent reason in the very fact of the constancy of crime why individuals should bestir themselves to alter the present conditions of society. And that this may be done is certain, for we have examples of a single man of genius exercising a considerable influence on a social system, and altering, therefore, the characters of the generalisations made therefrom. It is open to the present generation by the institution of systematic education, by bringing classes more closely together, by a general system of moral and physical hygiene, and by other modifications of the causes which determine individual nature, to change the character of the society of coming generations. So that Quetelet's so-called law, in place of being a discouraging fact, is really, when rightly regarded, an encouraging one, for it distinctly indicates, as our experience of the individual criminal does also, that the true way of reformation, whether of society or of the individual, is to determine as far as possible the causes which determine individual formation.

It must be admitted that, until quite recently, our mode of dealing with crime has been as unphilosophical as our mode of dealing with disease; it has been concerned mainly with what is often an incurable result, in place of being directed to prevent it by doing away with

* Quetelet, 'Sur l'Homme,' vol. i, p. 10.

the conditions of its production. And it is very interesting to note how the excuses which some criminals make show that they instinctively recognise their dependence on their antecedents; they really feel that they could not help the crime, that they are inevitably what they are. A returned woman, who has forfeited her ticket of leave, always asserts that it wasn't to be avoided—something made her seek out the old pals, or steal her neighbour's goods again.

“ ‘I did try very hard, Miss,’ she will sometimes say to the matron who may be interested in her; ‘I did try very hard, but it wasn't to be. I was obliged to steal, or to watch some one there was a chance of stealing from. I did try my best, but it couldn't be helped, and here I am. It wasn't my fault exactly, because I *did* try, you see, Miss!’ ”

Then, again, they rarely blame themselves, but almost invariably attribute their fall to some external circumstance. “ ‘Ah! it was all along o' the play I ever came here!’ I heard a woman mutter in response.

“ ‘It's always along o' something! The play, the concert-room, the streets, the false friend who tried to lead her wrong, and she so innocent!—the bad advisers, the cruel mother, father, husband, anybody—never her own weakness, or headlong desperate plunge to ruin!’ ”

Perhaps they are not deceiving themselves as wilfully as might at first sight appear. It is the convicted criminal who is now looking quietly back on the past from a very disagreeable position, and is certain that, as far as her poor will was concerned, she never designed that this should be the end of it. The descent has been so easy and pleasant, that she scarce knew she was moving until she arrived at the bottom; the crime and conviction have been the consummation of a gradual degeneration, to which the result has painfully awakened her. It is plain, as she cannot but allow, that she has gone very wrong; and yet it is clear to her mind that she is not so guilty as she appears. Accordingly, she seizes on some prominent circumstance in the past, and assigns to it an undue predominance in the causation of the result. It is the way of human nature generally to accuse circumstances and to excuse itself; and it is the way of female nature to feel circumstances rather than to reason about them, so that the circumstance is always to blame, and the individual is always a victim. Accordingly, we are not much surprised to learn that female prisoners generally consider themselves harshly used when they are sentenced.

“ I may add here that, with all the prisoners, the crime is of little account, and the sentence for it only a subject to be deplored. It is always a harsh sentence, or an unjust one. ‘If old Judge —— or that —— had been on circuit, instead of ——, I shouldn't have had all this time to serve.’ ”

It appears that female prisoners are, like female lunatics, much

more troublesome than those of the male sex ; and a woman writing of women declares, as the result of her experience, that no two lines are more true to nature than these of Tennyson —

“ For men, at most, differ as Heaven and earth,
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and hell.”

“ In the penal class of the male prisons there is not one man to match the worst inmates of our female prisons. There are some women so wholly and entirely bad, that chaplains give up in despair, and prison rules prove failures, and punishment has no effect, save to bring them to death's door, on the threshold of which their guilty tongues still curse and revile, and one must let them have their way or see them die.”

And yet, low as these outcasts have sunk, lost as they are to all sense of propriety, they never lose their vanity. The first great trial which the female prisoner has to undergo is the cutting off of her hair. “ Women whose hearts have not quailed, perhaps, at the murder of their infants, or the poisoning of their husbands, clasp their hands in horror at this sacrifice of their natural adornment—weep, beg, pray, occasionally assume a defiant attitude, and resist to the last, and are finally only overcome by force. One woman will be resigned to her fate on the instant ; and, with a Socratic stoicism, will compress her lips and submit herself to the shears, and march away to her bath afterwards, in a business-like manner. A second will have a shivering fit over it, a third will weep passionately, and a fourth will pray to be spared the indignity, and implore the matron on her knees to go to the lady-superintendent and state her case for her. I can remember one person delirious for a day and a night after the operation—the mortification of ‘ losing her hair,’ or the impression made upon a nature more highly sensitive than ordinary, tending to that unfrequent result. She was a young, fair Scotch girl, and her ‘ Dinna cut my hair—oh ! dinna cut my hair ! ’ rang along the deserted corridors with a plaintive earnestness.”

Many are the devices and persevering the efforts which they make to obtain some little adornment for their persons. A woman who is to the last degree depraved, who does not care for the abhorrence which she excites even among the worst of her fellow-convicts, will exercise all her ingenuity, nay, will even behave with some propriety, in order to secure a hoop for her petticoat, a scrap of tallow for her hair, or something to redden her cheeks with. And a piece of broken glass, blackened so as to serve for a looking-glass, is a treasure beyond price.

One night, as the matron passes along the corridor, “ a poor delicate woman appears at the iron grating of her cell to exchange a few words with her. ‘ I had a candlestick in my hand at the time, and was passing to my own room at the end of the ward.’ ”

“‘Lord bless you, Miss!’ whined the woman; ‘I’m so glad to see you to-night—I’ve something on my mind.’

“‘You must not talk—you’ll disturb the other women.’

“‘I’ll only whisper it, if you won’t mind; just a word, Miss.’

“‘Just a word’ is a great boon—an everlasting favour conferred—with the more grateful of this class, and I went nearer to the grating to hear her statement. She began in a low lachrymose vein, intended to arouse my sympathy and interest in her coming revelation, and then suddenly darted a long naked arm through the grating, and hooked some of the melted tallow from the candle in my hand.

“‘It’s on’y jist a scrap of tallow for my hair, Miss,’ said she, applying it to her hair very rapidly with both hands; ‘it do get awful rough without fat, to be sure! And I’m very much obliged to you, Miss—God bless you!’”

The next story is an excellent illustration of the success which a determined will may obtain over the most unfavorable circumstances.

“In my early days at Millbank prison, I have a consciousness of one woman raising the envy of her fellow-prisoners, and startling the authorities, by the very brilliant colour of her cheeks. That her cheeks were painted there was little doubt. I do not think she attempted to deny it; and in the absence of any colouring matter in her cell, or about the prison, this gave rise to much speculation among the prison officers.

“This woman kept her secret to herself for some time, and it was only by careful watching that the plan of operation became at last apparent, and gave evidence of considerable ingenuity to attain her ends. It is customary among the female prisoners to make the cotton shirts for the male convicts of Millbank; blue cotton shirts, with a red stripe crossing the texture. These stripes, it was afterwards ascertained, the woman had been in the habit of drawing open, or carefully unravelling, until a sufficient number of threads were obtained to soak in water, by which operation a colouring matter was procured that she transferred to her cheeks, for the better adornment of that portion of her countenance.”

Certainly vanity appears so deeply implanted in the female nature that it might almost be considered an instinct thereof. A woman’s destiny in life depends, in a great measure, upon the admiration which she excites in the other sex, and accordingly the adornment of her person is the necessary means of winning her life-game—a manifestation of the self-conservative instinct of existence. No wonder, then, that vanity appears in the ugly squaw of the prairies, in the negress of Africa, in the inmate of the lunatic asylum, and in the prison convict; persisting, in fact, amidst the decay of all that is good in female nature, and, like other instincts, departing only with departing life.

It appears that female prisoners are much given to periodical

outbursts of violence, which are known amongst the officials as "breakings out." The glass of their cells is smashed, their blankets and sheets torn up into strips, and all the mischief possible done, until with fighting, and scratching, and screaming, they are removed by the guards to the dark cell. And such is the force of example, that one "break out" is almost sure to be followed by others. We candidly confess that, when we learn the day's routine at Millbank, and consider the impulsive, unreasoning temperament of woman, we do not much wonder at these outbreaks. At a quarter to six the bell rings, and every prisoner must be dressed and ready for inspection at six. At six the cell is opened, and cleaning and bed-making proceed till half-past seven, when breakfast is served. Breakfast over, the work of the day begins—coirpicking, shirt-making, &c. ; and this work is done by each woman separately in her cell, no conversation being allowed with the other prisoners. At a quarter-past nine the chapel-bell rings for chapel; and a quarter to ten morning service begins. At half-past twelve water is served out to prisoners; at a quarter to one, dinner; after dinner work again. An hour each day is devoted to exercise, which consists in the women of a ward walking round the airing court in Indian file and in silence, a matron being in attendance to see that no one speaks, which, of course, some one does. After the hour's silent tramp the women return to their cells, and go to work again till half-past five, when gruel is served out. Then follow prayers, which are read in each ward by a matron. After prayers the names are called over, and each prisoner answers; then succeed more coirpicking and shirt-making till a quarter to eight. From that time reading is allowed till half-past eight; and then the beds are made, and at a quarter to nine the gas is turned out, and each prisoner is supposed to be in bed. It may readily be conceived that no punishment could well be greater than this monotonous system of enforced regularity to those who have lived a wild life of freedom from all restraint, and have obeyed nothing willingly but their own passions. The male convict recognises the folly of kicking uselessly against the official pricks, and has sufficient control over himself to accept his position without foolishly rebelling; but the female prisoner seems incapable of anything beyond the feeling of the present, and, in violation of the most common prudence, breaks out every now and then into useless violence. In prison, as out of prison, when woman's feelings are concerned, reason is but as a rope of sand to restrain her. A prisoner, with the certainty that her lot must be made much worse by violence, will inform the matron that she is going to "break out."

"What for?"

"Well, I've made up my mind, that's what for. I shall break out to-night—see if I don't!"

“‘Has any one offended you, or said anything?’

“‘No, no; but I *must* break out—it’s so dull here. I’m sure to break out!’”

And accordingly her woman’s reason prevails, and she breaks out, and gets bread and water and the dark cell for some time.

The matrons sometimes need all their self-control to restrain themselves from breaking out—such is the force of example in sensitive womanly nature.

“One matron, who has since left the service—a matron of a somewhat impulsive disposition—once told me in confidence, and with a comical expression of horror on her countenance, that she was afraid she would break out herself, the temptation appeared so irresistible.

“‘I have been used to so different a life—father, mother, brothers and sisters, all around me, light-hearted and happy—that it’s like becoming a prisoner oneself to follow this tedious and incessant occupation. I assure you, Miss —, that when I hear the glass shattering and the women screaming, my temples throb, my ears tingle, and I want to break something dreadfully.’”

As a rule prisoners do not like chapel, for they “can’t make out what the parson’s driving at.” And as prison books are mostly of a religious character, many of them object to read them. One prisoner, on being asked if she would like a book, replied scornfully, “Not one of *your* books; they are always driving religion at me. Haven’t I got religion enough there to worry me?” pointing to the prison Bible. Another woman was very fond of reading ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ and would relate to the other prisoners, with great animation, the villainies of Legree, so that considerable virtuous indignation would be aroused in the breasts of her listeners. “What an awful wretch that man must have been!” was the remark on that personage by a woman suffering a long sentence for the cold-blooded murder of her child! So easy is it to be virtuously indignant at the sins of others, and to forget our own. Well may we exclaim—

“Oh, that some power the gift would gie us,
To see ourselves as others see us.”

There is an ingenious impudence not unfrequently displayed amongst them.

“‘Miss —,’ said a troublesome convict, one afternoon, to her matron, ‘I think my voice is improving.’

“‘That’s good news, Smith.’

“‘Just you listen, Miss, when we sing in chapel the *can of laters and dominoes*,’ meaning, it may be remarked, the *Cantate Domino* of our evening service.’”

During the reading of the communion service one morning, it was observed that the prisoners around this same Smith were convulsed with laughter, she alone maintaining a devout expression of coun-

tenance. The matron was obliged to leave her seat to discover the reason of the unseemly mirth; and it was then found that Smith was responding to every commandment thus: "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep jackdaws."

The authoress gives us short sketches of certain very desperate characters, whose behaviour was outrageous in the extreme. It is charitable, if not actually necessary, to suppose that some of them must have been insane. One Maria Copes gained an unenviable notoriety amongst prison officials, and indeed successfully defied all the appliances of prison discipline. She possessed extraordinary strength, and seemed quite insensible to pain. When confined in the dark cell she tore up the flooring, and would run full tilt with her head against the wall, so that the matrons feared she would kill herself. When put in the padded room, she tore that to pieces with her teeth, and ran up the wall like a panther—behaving for all the world like a wild beast gone mad. A medical consultation was held for the purpose of deciding whether she was insane or not; and although the doctors decided she was not, the prison officers always considered that she was. Great suspicion necessarily attaches to any display of insanity in prison, as it is a common trick there to feign madness. Our authoress thinks, nevertheless, that the doubts of insanity are carried too far, and that the lives of the officers and of other prisoners are sometimes endangered by the reluctance of the medical authorities to pronounce a woman insane. On one occasion a matron was all but murdered at Brixton prison by one of these doubtful women, who was after that immediately sent to Fisherton Asylum. Another lunatic destroyed herself by leaping over some railings into a yard below. "There are more women really and radically insane in our prisons," she says, "than are dreamt of in a director's philosophy; consequently all the conceits and vagaries of madness are prevalent in our prison wards." She suspects that many of the cases which are put down as feigned attempts at hanging for the purpose of being sent to the infirmary, are real attempts on the part of insane prisoners; and very fairly demands that at any rate a special ward should be provided for those whose sanity is doubtful. This would only be right to the prisoner herself; seeing that the others very diligently plague her and play tricks upon her when they perceive that "she's not all there;" and would be just towards the officers who have the immediate care of her.

The insanity of prisoners, when carefully examined, would probably fall under three divisions. The first division would comprise those who were going mad before admission into the prison, in whom the crime for which they had been sentenced was one of the early symptoms of a degenerating mind. To this class belonged the notorious Celestina Sommers, who was sentenced to death for the murder of her child, but whose sentence was afterwards commuted to

penal servitude for life, greatly to the indignation of the public and newspaper writers. After admission into the prison her insanity soon declared itself, and she gradually became more and more demented until she was removed to Fisherton House, where she died. It is not impossible, perhaps not improbable that some, like her, diseased in mind, and like her criminal by reason of their disease, have been hanged; but even if this has happened, it will scarcely justify the self-complacent declamation of those who make it their business to cry out at the so-called barbarity of the law. It is not within the power of human insight to discern the end of responsibility and the beginning of irresponsibility; and the strong arm of justice would be paralysed if a reasonable caution were allowed to degenerate into inactive timidity. Where there is no evidence of insanity previous to the commission of the crime, it must always be held that the crime itself does not, save under very exceptional circumstances, constitute evidence thereof.

The second class would consist of those who, from the circumstances of their birth and their bringing up, had so grown to crime that it had become a part of their nature; they are the "moral idiots," or they might not unjustly be called the manufactured criminals of society. For, as Mr. Ruskin observes, "if you examine into the history of rogues, you will find that they are as truly manufactured articles as anything else." If we reflect for a moment on the matter, it will be evident that a criminal cannot be supposed to be specially designed in the constitution of the universe; and if he has not come to pass in that way, then he must be indebted for his disposition either to his inheritance or to his education. We may try our best to gauge the degree of his responsibility, but we ought not to forget that the effect is not responsible for its cause, but that the cause is responsible for the effect.

The third division of insane prisoners would be formed by those who had become insane in prison, having been helped on to madness by the system enforced. Under the strict and tedious monotony of a system of prison discipline, the impulsive and ill-regulated mind, which cannot conform to circumstances, must either break out into periodical outbursts of violence, and thus obtain variety by obtaining punishment, or must break down to the circumstances and pine into a melancholy madness. It is not unlikely that the "breakings out," which are so annoying to prison officials, are the salvation of some prisoners who but for them would go mad. Perhaps we are at times a little inconsiderate in our judgments upon humanity. We know very well that if a plant be taken up and placed in circumstances which are the opposite of those under which the seed has germinated and grown into a plant, it will not live, but will surely die. Why then should we deem it strange that a human mind which has developed under certain circumstances cannot accommodate

itself always to a sudden and complete change in them, but gradually decays under their influence? When an individual cannot conform to circumstances, and circumstances will not conform to him, either he or the circumstances must break down; and, accordingly, when we have on the one side a prison system, and on the other an ignorant, impulsive, weak-minded criminal, the result will not be doubtful.

It is only right, as it is gratifying, to relieve somewhat the darkness of the foregoing pages by quoting an instance of a display of feeling in a convict, which the authoress on one occasion witnessed, and which testifies to some good being left, even where it might not have been expected.

“I have a remembrance of looking through the ‘inspection’ of a cell some years ago, and perceiving a prisoner, with her elbows on the table, staring at a common daisy which she had plucked from the central patch of grass during her round—one of those rude, repulsive, yet not wholly bad prisoners, from whom no display of sentiment was anticipated. Yet the wistful look of that woman at her stolen prize was a gleam of as true sentiment as ever breathed in a poet’s lines. A painter might have made much of her position, and a philosopher might have moralised concerning it—for the woman wept at last, dropped her head down on the table between her linked hands, and shed her bitter tears silently and noiselessly. The prison daisy must have spoken of the old innocent times—of the fields she crossed once with old friends—perhaps of daisies like unto that before her which were growing on a mother’s grave.

“Six months afterwards I saw that flower pressed between the leaves of her Bible—a little treasure I should not have had the heart to take away, had there been any laws of confiscation concerning daisies in ‘the books.’”

Changed, indeed! painfully changed are things since the little girl rolled among the flowers and platted daisy chains with her companions. Since that innocent time she has wallowed through much sin and woven on the loom of time much work after the devil’s patterns; and now she has received her wages. The prison daisy has loosened the barrier of her hardened nature; the past and the present have met, and the bitter tears of the lonely criminal are the sincere commentary on her mistaken life.

A few words may be added in conclusion upon the manner of dealing with prisoners. The question is presenting itself in a very decided manner as to what the object of our present prison system really is. Is it designed to punish criminals or to reform them? If the latter, where is the evidence of success to justify persistence in it? The prison matron has plainly a very poor opinion of the reformation effected, and can only relate to us two cases in which there was even a hope of it. One of these after trial relapsed into

crime, and the end of the other was doubtful. We never heard of a benevolent family taking a reformed criminal or a reformed prostitute into their service without being grievously disappointed by the result ; and it is useless and unjust to blame the popular suspicion of reformed criminals, and to talk sentimentally with regard to their unfortunate position, if the popular opinion is founded on fact. It is unquestionably just that, in a moral point of view, everything possible should be done towards reforming criminals, but is it not the simple fact that, in a scientific point of view, it is an extremely discouraging task, and, in an economical point of view, an extremely unprofitable one? If, however, there be evidence sufficient to justify the present system, let it be presented in a reliable form, and the public will very gladly go on with the good work. But let it be clearly understood that good behaviour in prison shall not be accepted as evidence of reformation out of it. According to all experience of human nature, the impulsive woman who "breaks out" is more to be relied on than the scoundrel who has self-control sufficient to play the hypocrite for a few years, because he knows very well that the term of his imprisonment will be shortened thereby. No injustice will be done to him, even if he is sincerely reformed, though he is compelled to serve the full time of his sentence ; for the judge, after due consideration, has given him that sentence as a just equivalent for his crime, or as the minimum of discipline which he must undergo before reformation can be expected to be thoroughly effected after such a crime. But that he should receive almost immediately the benefit of his professed or real reformation in the diminution of a punishment which he has most justly deserved, and which is an actual debt to the past, is contrary to all ideas of justice, and really puts a high premium on skilful hypocrisy. Let him pay his debt to the past, and he will receive the reward of reformation in full time after leaving prison, when his well doing in the world bears fruit. And as regards his account with society, he should, if he is sincere, be extremely grateful to it for having reformed him ; whatever has been his punishment, if it has succeeded in making him an honest man, he is under an obligation through time and eternity to society. Even those benevolent persons who have the greatest faith in the reformation of criminals might well consent to that by which they would obtain a surer guarantee of reformation ; and at any rate they might seriously consider whether it is desirable to talk and write about criminals as if they were ill-treated and interesting mortals who are deserving of all possible sympathy. Reform them, and society will not be wanting in gratitude ; but reserve the zealous expression of sympathy for the honest workman who prefers partial starvation to the yielding to temptation.

If, however, the object of imprisonment is punishment, if punishment is vindictive, on the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth

for a tooth, then it is becoming an important question whether our prisons are really answering that purpose. It is now accepted as a fundamental principle, that any system which deteriorates the prisoner, either in body or mind, is unjustifiable. But how is it possible to punish a man at all without injuring his body or his mind? To make a man conscious that he has a body or mind, is to inflict pain upon him; and pain is not a condition of perfect health. It is really impossible, as the history of prison discipline proves, to harmonise the opposing principles. When the Quakers of Philadelphia, who were horrified at the notion of punishment involving corporal violence, succeeded in doing away with capital punishment there, they hit upon the plan of enforcing complete solitude by putting the prisoner in a small cell without books, without work, and without companion; thereby benevolence, careful of the criminal's body, ingeniously succeeded in torturing his mind into madness. More humane than that surely were the bottle-shaped pits, or *oubliettes*, into which the victim was dropped down to die of suffocation, and which were in olden times such favorites with the church as a means of death without bloodshed; they were facetiously called *vade in pace*. When solitude proved so injurious in its consequences, the silent system was adopted; but it was impossible to enforce it without the help of the whip, and great abuses necessarily occurred. After that had been abandoned as a system, labour was adopted as the fundamental principle of prison discipline; and to prevent the evil effects of association of prisoners, and as a practical compromise, the present costly separate system was put in force. The advantages of labour are evident: it is a safeguard against the ill effects of solitude; it teaches obedience to those who hate it, and in that way acts as a sort of punishment; it economises the expense of punishment; and it may, perhaps, implant industrious habits in the prisoner. All which is very well, but it does not satisfactorily dispose of the question whether the present system is sufficiently disagreeable to act as a preventive of crime. When it is notorious that individuals commit crime rather than go to the workhouse, it is not possible to avoid the conclusion that the comfort of the prison actually acts as an incentive to crime. The prison matron relates a story which illustrates these observations, and is well adapted to excite further reflections in the minds of those who are interested in the difficult question of prison discipline.

"Old Granny Collis was 'a quiet, meek, obedient prisoner, truthful, reading her Bible without parade, and a communicant,' always willing to her work, and keeping her cell a pattern of neatness. She felt the prison to be her only home, and was exceedingly loth to leave it.

"'I don't know what I shall do when my time's up,' she said to me once; 'there's no one to take care of me outside, and I'm afraid

they'll treat me very badly at the workhouse. Well, I suppose, Miss, I must make the best of it.' ”

She was evidently very fearful about the workhouse, but at any rate had this comfort, that if it did not agree with her she might get back to prison.

“ ‘I'll try the workhouse,’ was her remark, one day, ‘but I'm thinking it won't suit me like this—not half so comfortable and quiet.’ ”

In due course her time of imprisonment expired, and the “cheerful, feeble old woman” was discharged.

But in a few months she reappeared at Millbank prison. Old Mary Collis had been convicted of a petty theft again, and was sentenced to a second term of imprisonment.

“ ‘I have come back to settle down for good,’ she said. ‘I know I've done very wrong, and that I'm old enough to know what's right by this time, but *I couldn't keep away*. I have tried the workhouse—they are so terribly noisy there, and there's not half the order there should be, and everybody wants to quarrel so. ‘Besides,’ she added with characteristic *naïveté*, ‘they don't understand my ways at the workhouse, and you are all so used to me by this time.’ . . . She fell into the same old habits—read her Bible as industriously as ever, took the sacrament, preserved even the same good temper, and *did* die before the term of her imprisonment was ended. A good prisoner, and as good a Christian as it was possible for a prisoner to be, perhaps. She died, I think at the age of seventy-six, in the infirmary ward of Brixton prison.”

No wonder that the anger of the public has arisen on account of the present prison system, as the following extract from an energetic article in the ‘Times’ of November 5th proves. We present it here for the consideration of readers.

“The persons in custody for these highway robberies are all well-known thieves. They have all been in prison before over and over again. Some of them reside in a place facetiously called ‘Ticket-of-leave Row.’ They belong to the class of London ruffians which it seems to be the present policy of our law, our police, our magistrates, and our judges, but more especially of our Home Secretary and our gaol chaplains, to foster and domesticate in the very heart of society. The whole of this great and most expensive judicial hierarchy seems to be established solely to catch thieves and let them go again. In former days we used to store our sewage in cesspools in our own back yards, and allow it to poison the soil all around us; under a wiser sanitary process we now run it away in drains, and send it to the sea. We have reversed this progress in the case of our moral sewage. We used to run it away to the Antipodes, where it had a chance of being purified by percolation; now we keep it and store it at home, letting it out from time to

time, and shutting it up again when its natural odours are found to be too dreadful. We are not, however, going into questions of transformation and reformation. These are subjects upon which people acquire cheap reputations for benevolence at the expense of the victims who are knocked down in the streets. It is natural that gaol chaplains and prison matrons should confine their sympathies to the creatures they see, and not extend them to the victim whom they never saw or who is yet to be. The 'prison matron' records in her book, that reprieved murderesses, on entering the prison, say, 'Good heart! who would have thought it was so comfortable?' and she shows how dutiful prisoner-daughters are to be heard imploring their visiting mothers to do some act that may make them partners in the comforts of a prison life. To attempt to argue with those who cannot bear to see a criminal unhappy, but would make his lot enviable to every one of our millions of honest poor, would be useless. They are sustained by the proud consciousness of a costless benevolence.

"In the interests of society, however, we must demand that these people should keep their pets shut up. Even if they feed them better than a pauper, better than a soldier, nay better than an honest mechanic, it is cheaper to keep them in than let them out. At large a professional robber costs, as it has been estimated, 300*l.* a year. As he can never sell the produce of his 'industry' at more than one sixth its value, it will take 300*l.* to give him 50*l.* for his modest necessities. We cannot afford this. Without putting any adventitious value upon our skulls, or betraying any unmanly repugnance to the process of strangulation, we must still, as a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, protest against the Ticket-of-leave system as it now works, and also against the whole principle of illusory sentences. As to the reformation of a hardened criminal in gaol, we all know now that the thing is a mere delusion founded upon the weakness or the conceit of some theorist or some simple-minded gaol chaplain. We have a thousand testimonies to this effect." And after adducing testimony the writer concludes thus:—"The present system must be reformed or London will be disgraced in the eyes of the world. The police must redouble their vigilance in order to make detection more certain; the judges must strengthen their sentences to make the examples more striking; the humanitarians must direct their energies to the homes of the honest labourer, where their benevolence may be exerted at their own expense, and not at that of the State; and they must be prevented from interfering with the wholesome severity of prison discipline; and the Home Secretary must, in cases of burglary and highway robbery with violence, abstain from interference with the sentences of the judges. At any cost of money or example the streets and homes of London must be protected."

H. M.